

Council on Postsecondary Education
September 18, 2005

New Statewide GEAR UP Grant Program

The U.S. Department of Education has approved funding to the Council on Postsecondary Education for a new \$42 million statewide GEAR UP program. The new grant doubles the resources in the GEAR UP program and allows the Council to continue the work begun in 2000 with the original state grant.

The Council will receive \$21 million in federal funds over the next six years to support college awareness and preparation activities for low-income students in a new group of Kentucky schools. GEAR UP partners across the state will provide an additional \$21 million in matching non-federal funds to support this program. The purpose of the GEAR UP program is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

GEAR UP Kentucky II will build on the success of the first GEAR UP grant to help schools make the shift to a culture of high academic achievement. A summary of the work of the first GEAR UP grant will be available at the Council meeting. GEAR UP Kentucky II will collaborate with multiple partners including state agencies, colleges and universities, businesses, and community organizations. The Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, a joint partner in the grant, will contribute \$6.6 million to support GEAR UP activities over the six-year grant period. Seven postsecondary host institutions, the Kentucky Department of Education, and the Kentucky Virtual University are among the primary partners in the grant.

Program Description

GEAR UP Kentucky II incorporates the GEAR UP *Kentucky Standards for a College-going Culture*, a set of core standards to help guide school efforts in fostering an environment of success. These standards are based on five strategic priority areas – awareness, rigor, engagement, access, and support – and are aligned with KDE Standards and Indicators for School Improvement. Program goals for rigor will focus on improving student performance on state and national assessments and increasing the number of students taking algebra by the eighth grade. Activities and services will be designed within the five priority areas to ensure that disadvantaged and low-income students are intentionally nurtured to prevent failure and increase the number that performs at the proficient and distinguished level on assessments in mathematics, science, and writing.

Participating middle schools will adopt the standards and target an area of improvement to address over a two-year period. GEAR UP will support school improvement projects through a mini-grant process that must complement other resources within or outside the school. Funded projects must enrich or expand instruction, curricula, or student academic support systems. At the same time, GEAR UP schools will facilitate student participation in essential activities that are designed for all students in the middle school grades and will ensure each student has access to these activities. Schools must also ensure student participation in early intervention activities that are developed by the host institution. Cohort-wide activities will include access to the World Wide Web resources at the GoHigherKy Web portal, college expos, academic skills assessment, early academic planning and advising about appropriate coursework to prepare for college, financial aid information and application procedures, and academic enrichment such as after-school and summer programs.

GEAR UP middle schools also will begin working with their high school counterparts immediately upon participating in the program, to ensure successful transition from middle school. Cooperating colleges, universities, and contractors will assist the Council in designing and providing professional development training and content specific curricula enhancement for school personnel.

Target Audience

GEAR UP must begin working with seventh grade students in the first year of the grant. A grade level of students will be added each year of the program. The Council will select three cohorts of students and continue providing services until the first cohort completes high school. Both host institutions and other college partners will assist the Council in coordinating early intervention activities and services for entire cohorts of students across the state.

In addition, the program will identify a percentage of students in each cohort that is significantly more at-risk than the rest of their peers and will provide supplemental academic services and support. At-risk status is measured by performance on the GEAR UP-approved academic skills assessments. Host institutions will design and develop these targeted services based on a needs assessment for each cohort.

School Sites

Schools selected for the program must have a seventh grade class in the building, and at least 50 percent of the school's enrollment must be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The final selection of GEAR UP schools will be announced after a fall orientation of prospective schools. Currently a total of 67 schools have been identified from among all eligible schools with a combined enrollment of more than 10,000 students. The grant has been approved to serve 4,500 students from among these schools. When the final selection of schools is made, those school sites selected will continue for the duration of the grant.

Host Institutions

Host institutions have agreed to assist the Council in coordinating the grant across the state – each has been assigned a designated area and will act as fiscal agent for the grant in those areas. In addition to coordinating cohort-wide activities, host institutions will develop early intervention programs to meet grant objectives defined for their region and address targeted needs of identified students. The host institutions are the Kentucky Community and Technical College System's Hazard and Elizabethtown campuses, Morehead State University, Murray State University, Northern Kentucky University, University of Louisville, Kentucky Council of Partners in collaboration with KCTCS Gateway Community and Technical College, and the Fayette County School System.

Cooperating Colleges and Other Partners

The Council will seek additional partners to implement and support activities for students, parents, and school personnel. More information about partnerships with GEAR UP is available at the Council's Web site.